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SOME OBSCURE POINTS IN THE MISSION PERIOD
OF TEXAS HISTORY.

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The history of Texas for more than a hundred years after the coming of the French is fragmentary and unsatisfactory. The casual reader can not have failed to be impressed by this fact, while the student discovers long lapses and obscurities in the story. The object of this article, then, shall be to point out a few of the gaps which exist in our knowledge of the century. The period which properly falls within our scope is marked, in a way, by the subject of this article; but, a little more definitely, it may be said to begin with the landing of La Salle in 1685 and to close with the secularization of the principal missions in the province in 1793.

The first narrative we know which tells of Texas reads like the wildest fiction. There is something pathetically romantic in the fateful coming of the Chevalier de La Salle and the little French colony to our coast; there is something strangely fascinating in the struggles of the Franciscan fathers to bring the red men to Christ. The halo of romance which surrounds this period is due in a measure to the meagerness of our knowledge concerning it. Little has been done to bring out of the archives of Bexar, Monclova, Chihuahua, Querétaro, City of Mexico, and Madrid the facts which would give us an accurate historical picture of the time. Until this is done, we must content ourselves with what we have of its history.

When La Salle anchored in the Espiritu Santo in 1685, he found himself in a land, which had been explored to be sure, but which had no civilized inhabitant; and with the erection of Fort St. Louis arose the dispute over the possession of Texas, to which the United States became a party by the purchase of Louisiana, which came so near precipitating a war with Spain, and which made possible the designs of Aaron Burr. The question was altogether unsettled till 1819, and indeed it finally did involve us in an unjust war with Mexico, which ended only with the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The matter now, so far as we are concerned, is settled,

and Mexico, though displeased, has come to look upon it in the same light.

There were, moreover, other consequences attendant upon this entry of the French; not directly, it may be; but all indirectly traceable to this one event. The entire life of the State has felt its influence. In the first place, the occupation of the country by Spain was thereby brought about. Indeed, it is possible that except for the French occupation of a day, as it were, Texas would have remained destitute of Europeans for scores of years. The lasting effect of it all is seen to-day in the laws, the institutions, the language left for our eternal heritage.

It is scarcely necessary to state how the French colony came to an end; the story is too well known to bear repetition. Perhaps I should say stories; for the truth is, more than one have appeared in print. But the generally accepted version is that through disease and conspiracy the colonists melted away, and that finally the tomahawk silenced the last soul in the miserable Fort of St. Louis. The other side is inclined to aver that the Spanish knew something of how the last Frenchman died. Doubtless the latter view has for its basis the several expeditions known to have been dispatched by Mexico in search of the French. How many there were and what they accomplished, the world is left yet to conjecture. Some were by sea and some were by land; but it was not till April 22, 1689, that a Spanish force¹ under Gov. Alonzo de Leon of Coahuila reached the blackened and deserted spot which had witnessed the rising and the setting of the French dominion in Texas.

It may seem a little strange that only with the coming of La Salle were the Spaniards brought to realize the fact that Texas, a country first sighted and explored by sons of Spain, might be lost to them. From this event, however, is reckoned the inception of the plan for the occupation of this territory, so fair with its meadows and hills and so peaceful with its kindly red men. De Leon's glowing report of the country, together with that of Padre Manzanet—who must be remembered as the father of Texas missions—concerning the friendly Indians, caused the viceroy, Galve, to consider the question of sending out a company to settle the land. Just at this time of indecision the report came that the French

¹ Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, Vol. I., pp. 399, 400.

from Louisiana had entered the territory of the Tejas Indians, and quickly was the viceroy brought to a conclusion.²

In the spring of 1690, a party consisting of about one hundred persons, with Gov. de Leon in command, set out for the region of the Tejas for the express purpose of erecting a mission. To this end three Franciscan friars under Father Manzanet accompanied the expedition. From Mexico they marched to the east till the Trinity (*Trinidad*) was crossed into the land of the Tejas. June 1, 1690, *Te Deum Laudamus* was chanted in the first mission. It was named San Francisco de los Tejas, in honor of St. Francis d'Assisi, the founder of the order of Franciscan friars.³ A little later another mission was established. It was known as Santa Maria. Two years later San Francisco was abandoned, never to be re-occupied. This is an exceptional case. Often, indeed, missions were abandoned, but in most cases sooner or later the friars returned to their labors.

It is through this short occupation, however, that we are to account for the origin of the name Texas as a territorial designation. It has worried some of our historians to explain this name, and in the explanation of it several ingenious stories, more or less romantic, have been invented. It is hardly worth while to mention these. The true explanation seems to lie in the fact that the Spaniards having applied the term *Tejas* to the original settlement made among the Tejas Indians, which was for many years the central point in the province, it came eventually to mean the whole region.

Before we proceed further, a few words on the general scheme of the Spanish occupation may not be out of place. What was its nature? There seems to be prevalent a sort of half defined assumption which makes the presidio or fort the initial step in the occupation, the missions following naturally thereafter. Nevertheless,

² Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, Vol. I., p. 401; Manzanet's Letter to Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Congora, MS., Agricultural and Mechanical College, College Station, Texas.

³ Manzanet's Letter; Villa Señor, *Theatro Americano*, II., 324; Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, Vol. I., p. 611, quoting Ramon, a note. Yoakum (*History of Texas*, Vol. I., p. 45) has missed the truth in stating that the mission was erected on or near the old French Fort St. Louis. Thrall (*Pictorial History*, Ch. III.) says no building was erected. He also missed the location. See Kennedy's Confusion (Vol. I., p. 218).

this opinion, sanctioned as it is by some writers, can not be maintained in the face of facts. The truth lies undoubtedly on the other side; that is, the mission was located first, then the presidio was established for its protection. The manuscripts which deal with these matters, so far as the writer has been able to observe, in every instance speak of the founding of the church or mission, and then naturally of the fort.⁴ Indeed, so true is this, when a mission was moved to a more favorable locality, which often happened, the fort was also moved. This was the case with Espiritu Santo; this was true when the Xavier missions were merged into the ill-starred San Saba;⁵ and, finally—to emphasize the subordinate place of the presidio—when the missions in the eastern part of Texas were removed to the San Antonio river, the presidio in the original Tejas was suppressed.⁶ But, after all, the church and the fort went together—a double purpose was to be subserved, and this must not be lost sight of. The *infieles* were to be converted and the country held for Spain. However, it was to the mission in the first place with its nucleus of converted Indians (*Indios reducidos*) that the grasping Spaniard looked for his abiding hold on the soil.

The year after the founding of San Francisco de los Tejas, Teran with a considerable force was sent out from Mexico with orders to establish eight missions. He penetrated the province of Texas as far as the first settlement, but whether or not he fulfilled his directions we do not know.⁷ It is probable, however, that no settle-

⁴ Manzanet's Letter; Altamira, Testimonio de un Parecer, MS., 1744, State archives. On Refugio, the last mission, see Letters of José Mariano Garza, Gov. Muñoz, Mariano Rodriguez, MSS., Bexar archives.

⁵ After the destruction of San Saba by the Indians, it was urged officially that the presidio of Amarillos, which protected, or rather which was to have protected the mission, should be abandoned, since it served no further purpose. (See Viceroy Amarillo's Letters, MSS., 1758, Bexar archives.) As a matter of fact it was not abandoned till some years later, serving first as a base of operations against the hostile Indians, and doubtless later as protector to some missions of which we shall have more to say.

⁶ Bonilla, Brevo Compendio. See also, Spanish Missions in Texas, p. 44, Library State University, Austin, Texas.

⁷ Altamira (cited above), one of the most trustworthy of our sources; John Gilmary Shea, Catholic Missions in America, Ch. V.; and Yoakum,

ments were made; for, indeed, no ruins have been discovered, nor yet have the names been preserved, and finally the records of the time breathe no word as to their existence.

In 1693 the missions which had existed in the province were deserted. The causes which led up to this may, in the main, be attributed to the outrages committed by the vicious soldiery. Father Manzanet tells us as much, and it was the same curse which hounded the missionary movement to its death. After this desertion of the province, there followed a period of twenty years in which no light burns. What took place of interest to us during that time, we know not. We can only believe that the wild tribes drove as madly in the chase as when the century was young and fought as fiercely. But in strange contrast to this we must think that over next the setting sun, when the dusk was in the wounded eyes of some red man, a wandering Franciscan would kneel to invoke a blessing of the one Father. Besides these restless, devoted friars, no civilized foot broke into the confusion which reigned as unbridles as in the primal age.

The Franciscans clamored for a re-occupation of the country with all the eager earnestness manifested by the Crusader in his cry for the redemption of the Holy Land.⁸ Indeed, the same spirit which moved the Crusader to pawn his life in battle for the Holy Sepulchre, urged the Franciscan, barefoot and with the knotted scourge fastened to his waist, into unknown wilds where dwelt the savage men whose souls were to be saved. But the government was deaf, and the time ran on. We are unable to say how long this chaotic state of affairs would have existed in the province had the French not begun operations in Louisiana in 1713. The fact remains that nothing was done by the Spanish government toward the re-occupation till the news reached the viceroy that a French expedition under St. Denis had marched from Louisiana to the Rio Grande, across the whole of Texas. St. Denis was arrested, but to this day the object of his journey has not been determined beyond dispute.

History of Texas, Vol. I., pp. 45, 46, say that settlements were made. On the other hand, Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, Vol. I., p. 404, would indicate a contrary opinion.

⁸ Altamira, *Testimonio de un Parecer*; Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, Vol. I, p. 405.

The Spanish viewed it in the light of French aggression and acted accordingly. But the fact seems to be that it was undertaken largely for the purpose of establishing commercial relations with the north of Mexico.

The lethargic Spaniard was aroused and now set about the founding of missions and presidios on a large scale. Indeed, this was the culminating period of the movement. During the seven years succeeding 1715 there were founded no less than nine missions. Of these, six were located in the territory adjacent to the Neches and Sabine rivers. They were, to be sure, in the basins of these streams,—but *where* in the basins?

Here, truly, we are brought face to face with one of the vexatious aspects of our history. The geography of the period is almost as darkly uncertain as is the story. It is only by patching together this bit of information and that, that we are able, with any degree of accuracy, to construct a map of this time.⁹ The mission buildings in the eastern part of Texas were largely of wood, and therefore, when abandoned, fell speedily into decay, leaving no trace behind to aid in the identification. Quite in contrast to these were the missions on the San Antonio river, some of which still, after a century and a half of bitter conflict and disaster, rear their deserted spires into an atmosphere warm with the sunshine, but coldly neglectful. Though little is known of most of the eastern missions, still less is known of some others. Indeed, as to the three missions which were located on the San Xavier river, no historian, so far as the writer's information goes, save Bancroft, has even mentioned their names. Even Bancroft speaks vaguely of their location.¹⁰ However, the Xavier river, as such, is unknown. The name

⁹ As to the method employed, a single illustration will suffice. Take San Francisco de los Tejas. It was something more than a day's journey to the east of the Trinity, not far from the Neches, and about nine leagues to the northwest of Mission Guadalupe at Nacogdoches. (Villa Señor, Teatro Americano, II., 324: also Bancroft, North Mexican States and Texas, Vol. I., p. 611, quoting Ramon, a note.) Now knowing as an absolute fact that modern Nacogdoches is on or near the original site of Guadalupe, we are able to locate pretty satisfactorily the first mission.

¹⁰ North Mexican States and Texas, Vol. I, p. 623. For location, see map in library Historical Society, Galveston; Thoribio Urrutia, Letter, MS. Bexar archives; also Appendix to Spanish Missions in Texas, cited above.

it bore when the Indians thronged its banks has been transformed in this later time. And there are other such instances. Mission Nuestra Señora de la Luz,¹¹ situated on the Trinity near the coast, was long unknown. It entirely escaped Bancroft. But of it, we hardly know more than that it existed in the middle of last century. As a matter of curious interest, it was from de la Luz that Padre Anastasio Romero wrote,¹² May 3, 1758, that it was desirable to leave the place on account of the malaria, *Indios bravos*, and an insufferable plague of flies.

But to turn now to the western part of the province, we shall see that still greater confusion exists. Even the Alamo is not free from a haze which surrounds its beginning.¹³ This obscurity is largely due to the fact that it was not located originally where it stands to-day. This was true of many missions.¹⁴ Indeed, there was hardly a one which enjoyed a continuous existence on the same spot. It was either being shifted about the country in name;—which, aside from the paraphernalia and some squads of Indians, was all that was transferred—or else, it was suffering from internal dissensions, Indian raids, scarcity or entire absence of neophytes, or what not.

But with regard to the mission establishments themselves in the west, it is plainly evident that there are some important revelations yet to be made. There are ruins in various parts which attest undeniably Franciscan occupation. But of these in particular we shall have little to say. It is sufficient to mention two sites. The first is in Edwards county on the Nueces river, and the ruins, which the writer has had occasion to survey, are unquestionably those of a mission. The outlines of the building and the trace of the *acequia* are still evident. Higher up in the mountains in Menard county,

¹¹ See Spanish Missions in Texas, pp. 40, 41, with notes.

¹² See Yoakum, History of Texas, I., Appendix by Giraud; also Bancroft, North Mexican States and Texas, Vol. I., 614.

¹³ Letter, State archives, Austin, Texas.

¹⁴ Take for instance Concepcion, San Juan, and Espada. These were located at first in the Neches country, but in order to be of more service they were transferred to the San Antonio river in 1731. (Bancroft, North Mexican States and Texas, Vol. I., p. 615; also Bonilla, Brevo Compendio.)

and not many leagues from San Saba, now crumbled into dust, is another ruin. The acequias are being used to-day by farmers, just as are those of the old missions along the San Antonio river.

There is no question as to the fact of the existence of these ecclesiastical establishments; but there *is* a question when it comes to the identification. Bancroft (*North American States and Texas*, I, 629) makes, it seems, the only endeavor in this direction. He gives San Lorenzo and Candelaria as the names of two missions founded among the Apaches.¹⁵ Since the Apaches ranged along both the Nueces and the San Saba, in all probability these old sites were the Missions San Lorenzo and Candelaria. But which was San Lorenzo and which Candelaria?

After that, we are able to say that there were *nineteen distinct* missions¹⁶ founded within the boundaries of Texas during the century known as the Mission Period. It will be observed that this enumeration counts each establishment only once. The fact that it bore different names at different times and enjoyed existence in more than one locality, has not entered into the record.

It will have been observed, as before indicated, that the first hundred years of Texas history is nothing more nor less than the story of the Franciscan occupation. Indeed, were this fuller history written, we should know more of the several Spanish expeditions;

¹⁵ But he errs decidedly in saying that these were probably located on the upper San Antonio river. It is to be presumed that this mistake came from a wrong conception as to the length of the river in question. His map (*North Mexican States and Texas*, Vol. I., p. 612) makes the river extend some leagues above the city of San Antonio, which is incorrect. (Kennedy, *Texas*, I., 48; Corner, *San Antonio de Bexar*.)

¹⁶ There were four pretty clearly defined periods or waves of mission founding. They are, with the missions which properly fall under them, as follows:

1. (1690-93) San Francisco de los Tejas; Santa Maria.
2. (1715-32) San Antonio de Valero (Alamo); Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion de Acuña; San Jose de Aguayo; San Juan Capistrano; Espiritu Santo de Zuñiga; Guadalupe; Nuestra Señora de los Dolores; San Miguel de Cuellar; San Xavier de Nagera(?).
3. (1747-1762) San Xavier; Candelaria; San Ildefonso—the three Xavier missions; Rosario; Nuestra Señora de la Luz; San Saba; Candelaria; San Lorenzo.
4. (1792) Refugio.

more of the life of the missions; more of the Indian tribes, their wars, and their truces with the missionaries; and finally, more of the last scene in the life of the missions in which was read the Secularization Act. We should see that the zealous friars did not all desert their flocks when the curtain was rung down; but that some of them remained and ministered like true disciples till the Anglo-Saxon came sweeping the red men before him.

From the nature of the limitations of this article, many things which interest, and in fact fascinate, the investigator have to be passed over in silence. For instance, no mention has been made of the massacre of San Saba which occasioned the dispatching of the troops under Parilla to *Islas Blancas* in 1759. Yet we know so little that the very tale of the march of the army of five hundred to *Apacheria*,—the conflict, the panic and flight, exist as hardly more than weird and stirring romance. Again, in 1719, when the French drove the Franciscans from East Texas, their after actions with regard to the Spanish settlements are unexplained. Furthermore, we have some information which shows that other French expeditions were sent later into the eastern region. Then, also, the mission life is a topic which might engage one through a considerable space. To follow up the daily routine of a mission through its existence would require a detailed description to which the modern practical mind might accord no hearing; but to him that can sympathize with the spirit of the past, these things are all full of inexpressible charm.

In the year 1793 the more important missions were secularized. That is to say, the missions with their property were transferred from the Franciscan order to the regularly organized Catholic church. This meant an entire reversion of the old order of things. The lands were parcelled out, each neophyte receiving a portion which he thereafter cultivated on his own account. He now lived, too, in his own house, and no longer stored his produce in a common granary. The mission movement, in all but its influence, was dead.

But the act of 1793 did not extend to all the missions, and it is not known definitely when some of them were secularized. Indeed, a few of them lived into the present century, which fact has doubtless given warrant for the statement made by some ardent Catholics, notably John Gilmary Shea, that the missions were prosperous

till the Anglo-Saxon came to desecrate and to destroy. But this assertion is not in accord with the facts.

Long before the American threatened the province of Texas the core of the system was decayed. The whole scheme was grounded on misconception and pillared by religious fanaticism, and doomed from the nature of things to fall. The main fallacy lay, beyond question, in the fact that the forces predominant in the life of the savage were wrongly estimated! He was not European. He was unable to grasp the significance of the Trinity or even the Parable of the Sower. Generations and centuries were destined to pass before this wayward child of the forest could ascend to such sublime heights. Little wonder that he chafed when for hours he bowed before the Virgin, uttering, like any machine, words which bore no meaning to him. All this mystery he could not fathom. But he heard and understood the voice of nature, the songs of the woods and the camp, and he fled from the presence of the friars. Other causes there were, to be sure, which conspired to overthrow the mission system, but for these no time remains.

If the reader's interest in this romantic period of Texas history has been, in any degree, intensified, it is, for the present, enough.